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On-line photo service may revolutionize finishing business

Rubinstein, Ed. Discount Store News. New York: Jan 6, 1997. Vol. 36, Iss. 1; pg. 4, 1 pgs

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Abstract (Article Summary)

Last month PictureVision launched an online service that could potentially alter the photofinishing business. Touted as the first online photo service, PictureVision's PhotoNet allows consumers to view pictures, e-mail photos, securely order reprints or enlargements, enhance pictures using photo editing software and store photos for up to 100 years.

Full Text (539 words)

Copyright Lebharr-Friedman, Inc. Jan 6, 1997

STERLING, VA. - By combining the power of the Internet with a network of photo retailers and wholesale photofinishers, PictureVision, based here, last month launched an on-line service that could potentially alter the photofinishing business.

Touted as the first on-line photo service, PhotoNet hopes to do away with photo albums and shoe boxes-and possibly the return-trip consumers have to make to the store to pick up developed photos or order reprints.

Located at www.photonet.com, the service allows consumers to view pictures, e-mail photos, securely order reprints or enlargements, enhance pictures using photo editing software and store photos for up to 100 years.

Although many startup companies continue to flock to the Internet, Picture Vision president and ceo Phil Garfinkle maintains that PhotoNet fulfills the initial promise of the World Wide Web by offering a useful, simple and powerful service for consumers. "Our goal at Picture Vision is to provide a bridge between traditional photography and digital imaging, while maintaining the consumer's link to photo retailers."

When consumers drop off their film at participating photo retailers, they check off the PhotoNet box on the processing envelopes. At price points starting at \$3.99, varying by retailer, their film is then uploaded to a participating retailer's PhotoNet Online PhotoCenter. The images are stored for one month and can be accessed through the Internet through a secure film access code.

Consumers view proof sheets on line (or make in-store purchases of reprints) and can order additional photos and keepsakes. Downloads and distribution by e-mail are free.

Pictures can also be manipulated through two of the most popular photo editing packages: Adobe's PhotoDeluxe and MGI's PhotoSuite. PhotoNet also works with image-capturing devices, allowing owners of digital cameras and scanners to use the service. Price points start at \$3.95 per photo.

At the core of PictureVision's mass market strategy is a "hub and spoke" distribution network of more than 2,500 retailers and

photofinishers that it expects to increase to 16,000 by yearend. Participating PhotoNet retailers include Eckerd, Wolf Camera & Video, Ritz Camera Centers, Cameras West and Kits Camera. Wholesale partners are Konica Quality Photo and direct marketer Mystic Color Labs.

Through establishing relationships with wholesale photofinishers, including Qualex and Fuji Photo Film, Picture Vision plans to offer PhotoNet services through discount chains. It is holding discussions with Kodak and plans to court Fuji Photo Film, which earlier this year developed an agreement with WalMart to be its sole supplier for wholesale photofinishing.

On software, American Greetings allows PhotoNet users to insert photos and send greeting cards through AG's Add-A-Photo card service. PhotoNet users who visit www.americangreetings.com can insert their favorite photo on an electronic greeting card and e-mail it at no additional cost. Greeting card prices range from \$1.95 to \$3.95, plus postage.

As is the case with the Advanced Photo System (APS), the killer applications in PhotoNet may lie in print reorderings and enlargements since the service frees users from dealing with negatives. However, unlike the APS system, which requires new cameras and photofinishing equipment, PhotoNet works with every type of camera and processing scheme.

Participating retailers also share in the revenue, Garfinkle said. The retailer's share of PhotoNet purchases can be as high as 90%, although actual percentages are tied to sales volume.

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